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**EGYPT | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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MAJOR1: Economics  
ABROAD\_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt

COURSE\_#1: Classical Arabic Literature in Translation  
COURSE\_#2: Modern Arabic Literature in Translation  
COURSE\_#3: Art and Architecture of the City of Cairo  
COURSE\_#4: Economic History of the Modern Middle East  
COURSE\_#5: International Trade

TYPES\_OF\_COURSES: Regular university courses

EXPLANATION\_OF\_COURSES:

COMMENTS\_ON\_COURSE\_WORK: AUC is based on an American-style curriculum. Therefore, the term schedule and grading system is similar. ie, Fall Semester runs from early September to middle of December and grading is letter

STUDENT\_BODY\_COMPOSITION: depended upon course, but a mix of both study abroad and full-time students in all of my classes

COMMENTS\_ON\_TEACHING: Compared to Amherst, teaching methods were more lecture based with limited student interaction. Additionally, lectures tended to be dry. Faculty was generally accessible however.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE\_PREPARATION\_NEEDED: Classes taught in English, so little to no foreign language preparation is necessary. UMass, Smith, and Holyoke do offer Modern Standard Arabic classes every semester, if you would like to learn some Arabic before you go although Egyptian Colloquial differs substantially from MSA.

DESCRIPTION\_OF\_HOUSING\_&\_MEALS: I lived in a dorm, but I had to find meals on my own.

**EGYPT | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

WHO\_MADE\_HOUSE/MEAL\_ARRANGEMENTS: Same as you would expect from Amherst.

LIVING\_COSTS: Dorm: \$3,000; Food: \$1,500

MEDICAL\_FACILITIES\_AVAILABLE?: Yes, there was a health center, and although I never had a problem, several friends received adequate services.

WHAT\_PROGRAM\_SERVICES\_WERE\_AVAILABLE?: Roughly two-week orientation program, which was great because it let me get a feel for Cairo by myself and through the school-sponsored program. No counseling or tutoring that I know of.

HOW\_DID\_YOU\_MEET\_LOCALS?: Living there.

DID\_YOU\_EXPERIENCE\_DISCRIMINATION?: Women were occasionally heckled, but I only heard of one case of harassment and other Egyptians swiftly and forcefully came to her aid. It is not a problem being an American as one might expect.

DID\_YOU\_TRAVEL?: Yes, it was the best part! I went to Luxor, Istanbul, the Red Sea, Mount Sinai. There were also school-sponsored trips, but they 1) cost more and 2) weren't worth the time.

WOULD\_YOU\_RECOMMEND\_THIS\_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?:

SUMMARY: Go!



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**EGYPT | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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MAJOR1: Religion  
ABROAD\_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: American University in Cairo AUC

COURSE\_#1: Studies in the Quran  
COURSE\_#2: Survey of Arab History  
COURSE\_#3: Arabic 103  
COURSE\_#4: Muslim Political Thought  
COURSE\_#5: Non Muslim Communities in the Muslim World

TYPES\_OF\_COURSES: Regular university courses

EXPLANATION\_OF\_COURSES:

COMMENTS\_ON\_COURSE\_WORK: The classes were very multifaceted in terms of whether or not they were "good" classes. They were not difficult except for Arabic and the occasionally prof who was so disorganized it resulted in random bad grades for the students. The sizes of the non language classes were about 40 kids per class. Grading system was pretty subjective and even a touch random. Nothing was ever clear or set in stone. The exams were scrunched but manageable and the same goes for the academic calendar. You have to not expect amherst at this institution. That being said I think that there is merit in trying a more university approach to academics for a semester and I still managed to learn a great deal. I wasn't challenged to think so much but I did learn a lot. Also while it was generally easy it was not TOO easy. There were still times of intense work and even all nighters for me. It could have been extremely easy had I just treated it like Amherst and spent a lot of time studying. However, if you study the city of cairo and thrust yourself into one cultural adventure after the other. You learn from the street and the school work fills the hours that you do slot for it.

STUDENT\_BODY\_COMPOSITION: Mixed, but varies by class.

COMMENTS\_ON\_TEACHING: Classes were almost straight lectures. Reading was less than necessary and of mixed quality. Discussion was rare. Some professors were really good while others were far from. That being said, my worst teacher was also instructive in ways he did not intend and so it with an open mind it was not wholly unproductive. They are less accessible than

**EGYPT | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Amherst Profs, but not as bad as many other horror stories that I have heard. I met with all of my Profs outside of class at least once and only twice did I need to and was unable to do so.

**ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE\_PREPARATION\_NEEDED:** I mean any Amherst Student can handle AUC intellectually. However students who are very rigid in how they approach education will struggle as general rules are not followed and things dont always work. The student body leaves something to be desired but this too becomes a challenge with many positive implications. You can take beginning Arabic there or up through very advanced levels. I would reccomend doing the survival arabic course however regardless of proficiency level. My teacher became my tutor and friend/mother and the week long class launched my street instruction of spoken arabic. It is truly NOTHING like Modern Standard Arabic.

**DESCRIPTION\_OF\_HOUSING\_&\_MEALS:** I lived in arguably the worst accomodations the university provides and it was fine. Again open mind helps here, but anyone who says otherwise just wasnt prepared for Cairo (and believe me many americans at this school are not - I dont care how I sound saying that but its true and keep it in mind in appraising your own readiness level but also in terms of what to expect from fellow abroad students). Dont get any meal plan crap. Eat your food on the street and breath in the cities tastes and smells. Be wary though, sickness happens so bring meds. Also there really isnt high end food restaurants just high end atmosphere and prices. All of this being said, I would advise if one has the gall to get your own appartment. Those who chose this option seemed to meet friends just as readily as the dorm students (the majority by far). The brochure made it seem like unless one is fluent in arabic this was not a wise option but there were those who spoke none at all who did fine. There are people at the ISSO office that can help you. Having an appartment gives your freedom and broadens the experience.

**WHO\_MADE\_HOUSE/MEAL\_ARRANGEMENTS:** Dorms provided but ISSO is quite helpful if you are nice to them, dont complain and find the right people. Basically if you have people skills and can be diplomatic with your requests you will be helped.

**LIVING\_COSTS:** I spent \$3000 on the semester I think, maybe a bit more. That covered all meals, an 8 day trip to turkey with airfare and accomodations. Domestic travel. Alcohol and clubbing entrance fees. Tourist stuff and souveneirs. Cairo is very cheap but bring enough money and travel slash do as much as you can.

**MEDICAL\_FACILITIES\_AVAILABLE?:** Yes

**WHAT\_PROGRAM\_SERVICES\_WERE\_AVAILABLE?:** There were services and they werent awful but that is all i can really say. Tutoring costs and is not covered and is expensive.

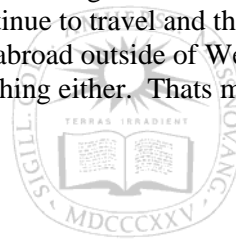
**HOW\_DID\_YOU\_MEET\_LOCALS?:** You have to take your worries and previous conceptions and hurl them far away from you. Immerse yourself and often do what you think is the LAST thing you should do. Cairo was extremely safe and the people very nice and hospitable, especially with an arabic word or two dropped and notification that you were a student not a tourist. So with that in mind do much and try to control very little.

**DID\_YOU\_EXPERIENCE\_DISCRIMINATION?:** Women are a bit at a disadvantage historically and so that is there, but in all honesty it was far from omnipresent. In my experience there was the occasional grope and cat call, but modest dress as well as male accompaniment past 1 or 2 am basically warded it off. If a female feels like she couldnt handle any unwanted attention then cairo might be rough, but its very minimal and also something that can be worked against with actions and dress.

DID\_YOU\_TRAVEL?: Yes. All around Egypt (sinai, red sea, valley of the kings, luxor) and Turkey. Turkey was an amazing vacation and I could have traveled more and would have wished to do so. there were also a few planned excursions, but i preferred to do on my own and not with large groups of americans. More of immersion experiences happened this way.

WOULD\_YOU\_RECOMMEND\_THIS\_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?: I loved Cairo and would recommend it to any adventurer. If you are meek in this regard then go elsewhere - Cairo is hard (but in a good way) and not for everyone to be sure. Dont go to Cairo if you arent pretty steady in your emotional health. It can end poorly. All this being said then YES go to Cairo. However for the 2008-2009 school year and beyond the campus is moving from downtown to outside of Cairo. So you wont get what i got. I would still recommend it if you get residence in the city so that you travel to school and live in the city and not the other way around. You have to be willing to get off your behind and do life there to make AUC work in the future. As for the many problems with the school, you can learn enough so that its not an absolute waste of time and the life experiences and learning from the streets of cairo in their twisted shapes and intense atmosphere more than make up for it.

SUMMARY: It entirely affects every aspect of this question. My last 3 semesters will be heavily affected in how I approach them and my future career plans follow suit. As for global comprehension - excuse my language but "[expletive]." I went to a place far from any life I have experienced in any state of the US (and I have been to around 45 of them) as well as the 5 or 6 countries in Europe I have visited. That being said - all of this plus 4 months and I still have no global comprehension. I have to continue to travel and then only maybe will I be able to understand anything. If you dont go abroad outside of Western Humanity, well I dont know how you would be able to understand anything either. Thats my opinion on that.



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**EGYPT | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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MAJOR1: Economics  
ABROAD\_DURING: Fall 2007

PROGRAM: The American University in Cairo

COURSE\_#1: Accelerated Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic  
COURSE\_#2: Introduction to Egyptian Colloquial Arabic  
COURSE\_#3: International Trade  
COURSE\_#4: Differential Equations

TYPES\_OF\_COURSES: Regular university courses

EXPLANATION\_OF\_COURSES:



COMMENTS\_ON\_COURSE\_WORK: The Arabic classes are very good, my teachers were very good at teaching the language, and the classes were well structured. I took an accelerated MSA course which met 10 hours per week, so my Arabic really improved and with a class size of around 15 we all got to know each other pretty well. Egyptian colloquial is extremely useful, and is also a fun class; there was not too much work for it, but it still gives a solid foundation for interacting with Egyptians. The Math and Econ courses were decent, not nearly as difficult as Amherst classes, class sizes were about 30 for each. Grading was not very tough, but I liked my professors. Classes are not a joke but are easier than those at Amherst, at least in math and econ.

STUDENT\_BODY\_COMPOSITION: In the Arabic courses they were all American (as expected) but in math and econ there were mostly Egyptians.

COMMENTS\_ON\_TEACHING: My Arabic professors were really good, they would fit in at Amherst. They were really energetic and good at teaching, really making you understand the language. They were also easily accessible outside of class. I have no complaints about my econ and math professors, they were entertaining enough and clear in presenting the material. They both had generous office hours.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE\_PREPARATION\_NEEDED: You could go to AUC without any preparation, including language proficiency, since even if you know Modern Standard a little you still won't understand Egyptian. I think it was still useful having language preparation though (I

**EGYPT | FALL 2007 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

had 4 semesters of MSA at Umass) since it makes learning colloquial easier and that's a key part of getting more from the experience. A course or two in Middle East history couldn't hurt either, but I don't think they would be necessary.

**DESCRIPTION\_OF\_HOUSING\_&\_MEALS:** I was also at AUC for the summer doing the Arabic Language Institute, and in the summer I stayed in the zamalek dorm, which was decent and a good place to make the transition to Cairo as well as meet people. DO NOT buy the meal plan they don't have very good food plus with the same budget you could eat out every night anyway. Next year (2008 fall) the school is moving to a suburb of Cairo, and there is not enough housing on the campus, so they're keeping the zamalek dorm open (which will be maybe an hour or more away from the new campus), on the other hand you would be actually in the city instead of in the middle of the desert. In the fall I lived in an apartment in zamalek, you can get a nice apartment and pay less than the dorm, though with the new campus location it might be somewhat antisocial.

**WHO\_MADE\_HOUSE/MEAL\_ARRANGEMENTS:** It's easy to sign up for the dorm, no one helped me find an apartment but I believe that service is available through the international student office.

**LIVING\_COSTS:** Dorm/really overpriced or expensive apartment for the semester: \$1600, food I had the equivalent budget of the meal plan so \$17/day, which is more than enough.

**MEDICAL\_FACILITIES\_AVAILABLE?:** I don't know, I never used them. Apparently the nurse offices are okay, I don't know anyone who had a problem.

**WHAT\_PROGRAM\_SERVICES\_WERE\_AVAILABLE?:**

**HOW\_DID\_YOU\_MEET\_LOCALS?:** Don't hang out too much with Americans, try to meet the Egyptian students though they are mostly very wealthy and not representative of most of the population. Just talk to people, cab drivers, etc. Take Egyptian Arabic, try to learn a little before going.

**DID\_YOU\_EXPERIENCE\_DISCRIMINATION?:** American/European and/or "scantily clad" women get hassled, but nothing very serious I don't believe, mostly I heard it was just annoying. Don't say you're gay, or atheist/agnostic, they won't understand. People ask what your religion is, just say Christian. People generally at least say they like Americans while hating the government, so that's fine, I wouldn't say I was Israeli.

**DID\_YOU\_TRAVEL?:** The school organizes trips for study abroad students, I went on a summer Arabic Language Institute trip to Luxor/Aswan which I enjoyed, there is some time to travel (end of Ramadan or spring break, depending on the semester, also before exams or on the weekends), more if you miss class which some people did. I got a chance to go to Jerusalem and Jordan during the semester, as well as weekend trips to Alexandria. So yes I guess is the answer.

**WOULD\_YOU\_RECOMMEND\_THIS\_PROGRAM/UNIVERSITY?:** I would definitely recommend it if you're studying Arabic or the Middle East, or just interested in "the Arab world" etc. Cairo is the heart of a lot of Arab culture, though not a particularly relaxing place to live, so that's exciting. Also there's plenty to see in Egypt and countries in the area. On the other hand, the new campus will be 1+ hours outside of downtown Cairo, so it will take more of an effort to experience the city.

**SUMMARY:** It's definitely a good supplement to classroom education at Amherst. You learn a lot about Arab/islamic/egyptian culture. Also since Cairo is a huge third-world city you get to appreciate how life goes on in similar cities. I don't think it has really changed my career plans because I don't have any, other than I do not want to work/live in Cairo.

